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ABSTRACT

A field method approach explored the social world of Anglo-, Chinese- and Italian-Canadian children in four schools and neighborhoods in Metropolitan Toronto. Field workers observed and interacted with their subjects over a four-month period, dividing each work week between two neighborhoods. These workers were able to observe whether a given subject had any close other-ethnic friends (intimate versus casual or superficial contact), and whether the subject confined socializing entirely to his/her own ethnic group (was ethnically encapsulated) or not. Some significant demographic correlates of cross-ethnic and cross-racial friendship formation indicated that, in the locales studied, opportunities for contact are positively and significantly related to friendship formation, and that, contrary to earlier American findings, own-group preference does not increase as the size of the out-group increases. (Author)

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DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES ON ADOLESCENTS' CROSS-ETHNIC FRIENDSHIP PATTERNS

A FOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD STUDY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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INTRODUCTION

There is, currently, much interest in ecological studies of human development. Led by Bronfenbrenner, many psychologists are seeking to use a much broader and more naturalistic approach to the study of children's behaviour and interactions, an approach which is ecological in emphasis, undertaking to examine subjects in the variety of non-laboratory settings in which their days are spent.

The particular juvenile behaviour which interests me is interaction across ethnic and racial lines. Children's inter-ethnic behaviour has most typically been studied in laboratories or classrooms, using indirect measures or sociometric tests. My object, in the study on which I am reporting, was to examine children's inter-ethnic friendship choices as they can be observed operating in classroom, lunch room, playground, neighbourhood streets, parks and shops, and at home.

Locale - meaning school and its catchment area, the neighbourhood of children's homes - was of interest to me as an independent variable. That is, I wanted to look at the effect of certain kinds of school and neighbourhood differences on the quantity and quality (that is, frequency and intimacy) of children's inter-ethnic interaction.

Let me state at the outset what I consider to be the benefits and costs of this kind of research. The advantages are, as implied above, the ability to capture real behaviours in real settings, as well as to define and isolate environmental effects on behaviour. The limitations are those inherent in naturalism and localism: a lack of control over the phenomena of interest, such that we cannot guarantee that we will see all that we are looking for, or as many instances of it as we would like, for comparative purposes; and, that phantom which stalks all ethologists and ethnologists,

the problem of the limited generalizability of findings from local samples - in this case particular neighbourhoods. One can attempt to define the qualities of one's local units of study, for comparison purposes, but the larger and more real the unit the more difficult are controlled comparisons, because of the number of potentially significant intervening variables which lie outside the research design, and very possibly outside the awareness of the researcher.

Being forewarned and thus forearmed, let us briefly examine the method and the results of a study of children's inter-ethnic friendship behaviour in several metropolitan neighbourhoods.

THE STUDY

The subjects were 153 children aged 12 - 15. Most of them were 13 or 14 years old. Half were boys and half were girls. One third were second generation Chinese-Canadians; one third were second generation Italian-Canadians; and one third were second, third, fourth and subsequent generation Anglo-Canadians. We thus included a visible minority group, a non-visible minority group and the culturally dominant majority group.

The environmental variable on the basis of which we chose our schools and neighbourhoods was demographic, and involved ethnicity. We wanted to see children in each of our three ethnic groups in two demographic situations; 1) where their ethnic group is numerically dominant in the school, and 2) where their ethnic origin group is numerically subordinate in the school. Local environments were neighbourhood schools (junior highs), and all subjects lived within the school catchment areas. Figures were available from the school board on the distribution of students by ethnic origin and mother tongue in each school.

The four schools we included represent the smallest number in which we could find our three ethnic groups, each one in a numerically dominant and a numerically subordinate position. Thus, for example, in School A, we had Italians in a numerically dominant position; and in School C, in a numerically subordinate position. Table 1 shows the distribution of the three ethnic groups in the four schools.

Table 1. Ethnic distribution of the three groups, by school.

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Anglo	11% (61)			71% (421)
Chinese		9% (77)	37 (265)	
Italian	38% (213)	5% (42)		

(The missing cells are left empty because we did not study all three ethnic groups in all four schools. There are probably some cases in each cell. Twenty-five to thirty children were drawn from each of the cells indicated to form our total sample).

The neighbourhoods are similar in many respects; all are urban, predominantely working class, are on major transportation routes and lie not far from the urban core. They differ in the distribution and proportion of ethnic groups, and therefore the four schools differ in their degree of ethnic heterogeneity. In one school only one group makes up more than 9% of the student body; in another school, there are four such groups. Table 2 lists these figures. This school ethnic diversity factor is an important one in determining students' opportunities for inter-ethnic friendships.

Table 2. Ethnic demography of schools.

School A	School B	School C	School D
*38% Italian (213)	43% Anglo-Can (377) 23% Greek, Macedonian (200)	*37% Chinese (283)	*71% Anglo-Can. (421)
23% West Indian (128)	*9% Chinese (77)	35% Portuguese (274)	7% Chinese (42)
*11% Anglo-Can. (61)	*5% Italian (42)	7% Anglo-Can. (54)	8% Greek, Macedonian (49)
9% Greek (50)	**8% W. Indian-born (73)	20% Other (all with 3% or less of school pop.) (153)	**4% W. Indian born (26)
19% Other (most with less than 1% of the school pop.) (106)	13% Other (all with less than 1% of the school pop.) (115)		9% Other (all with less than 2% of the school pop.) (55)
Total pop. 558	Total pop. 885	Total pop. 765	Total pop. 593

* Indicates the groups where our subjects are found.

** In Schools B + D, second-generation West Indian children were not identified, and would be included with Anglo-Canadians.

PROCEDURES

Instead of using self-report measures of friendship, we used the field method of observation over time. Six field workers were employed, and each one worked with between 25 to 30 children. Each field worker worked in two schools and their adjacent neighbourhoods, and with children of the same sex and ethnicity as him/herself.

Most of the contact with the children over the four month period was on an individualized basis, with field workers conversing informally with the subject on the school grounds, in the neighborhood, and at home.

The focus of the study, as it was communicated to the children was on their use of their neighborhood, and of the metropolitan area. The initial activity (making a neighborhood map) established this focus, and the field workers maintained it in the first interview, and subsequently by going on neighborhood walks and visiting neighborhood shops and hang-outs with the children. At no time before the end of the observation period did the field workers express interest in the subjects' attitudes or behaviour toward members of their own or other ethnic groups.(Attitudinal data was collected at the end of the observation period, but is not reported here. Also, the Whole City Catalogue data includes these four neighbourhoods, and is a source of further data on local children's inter-ethnic attitudes and practices.) The intention was that the children should not be self-conscious in the presence of the field workers about who their friends were or weren't, or about what they said on the subject of ethnicity or race. Our strategy appeared to be successful, in that we obtained information on inter- and intra-ethnic behaviours and attitudes without resorting to direct questioning; and also in that our subjects appeared to see the field worker as a student of patterns of neighborhood use by children. In fact, we used all the information we collected on neighborhood use and neighborhood integration and satisfaction; but the ethnic dimension was an intervening variable of whose importance the children were presumably not aware.

The field workers observed and interacted with their subjects over a four month period, dividing their week between two neighborhoods. During home visits, neighborhood walks, and lunch-time meetings at school, the field workers were able to observe whether a given subject had any close other-ethnic friends (intimate versus casual or superficial contact) and whether the subject confined his socializing entirely to his own ethnic group (was ethnically encapsulated) or not. Close friends were those whom the

subject saw regularly during the week at lunch and after school and/or regularly spent week-end time with.

Our hypotheses were:

1) that children whose ethnic group represented a relatively small proportion of the student body would have more inter-ethnic friendships than children whose group dominated the school numerically, and that this would be true both within and across ethnic groups; and

2) that the greater the ethnic diversity of the school, the more friendly inter-ethnic contact we would observe.

While both hypotheses would appear to be self-evident, on the grounds that actual inter-ethnic friendship choices should increase as the opportunities (in this case, numerical opportunities) for it increase, this has not been the finding of most studies. (For a review see St. John, 1975, pp. 189-193 and Ziegler, 1979, pp. 376-380.)

RESULTS

Both hypotheses were supported. Our data shows that friendly contact is related to ethnic diversity. Schools A and B, where ethnic encapsulation (exclusive within group friendship patterns) is lowest and close out-group friendships are most common, are the most ethically diverse of the four schools. Schools C and D, where there are fewer ethnic groups of any significant size, show significantly fewer out-group choices.

In School B, a student could choose his friends from among five ethnic groups, each of which makes up 5% or more of the school population. In School A, there are four such groups; and in Schools C and D, three.

Table 3. Percent having close friends outside own ethnic group.

A	B	C	D
70.2% (33)	64.4% (29)	13% (4)	39% (9)

Table 4. Ethnic encapsulation, by school.

	A	B	C	D
All friends are in own ethnic group	18.2% (8)	6.7% (3)	45% (14)	62% (13)
Most friends are in own ethnic group	40.9% (18)	33.3% (15)	36% (11)	5% (1)
Total	59.1% (26)	40.0% (18)	81% (25)	67% (14)

Table 5. Summary table: inter-school comparisons (schools ranked from 1 (high) to 4 (low) on each variable)

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Ethnic diversity	2	1	3	4
Close out-group friend-ships	1	2	4	3
Ethnic encapsulation	4	3	1	2

Tables 6 and 7 show the importance of the density factor in inter-ethnic friendship patterns. For all three ethnic groups, the percentage of close out-group friends is much higher and the degree of ethnic encapsulation much lower when the subject's ethnic group is relatively small in the school population. For each group in the dominant situation, the majority of children choose all or most of their friends within their own ethnic group, but when their group is in the subordinate position, only a minority in each ethnic group shows ethnic encapsulation. The differences in close out-group friendship rates and in the rate of ethnic encapsulation in the dominant and subordinate situations are statistically significant at the .001 level where r = .29 (ethnicity/close friends) and r = .38 (ethnicity/all friends) respectively.

Table 6. Percent who have close friends outside own ethnic group, by density of own group in school.

	Anglo	Chinese	Italian
Group is numerically dominant in school	39% (9)	13% (4)	68% (17)
Group is numerically subordinate in school	74% (14)	48% (11)	81% (17)

Table 7. Ethnic encapsulation by density: percent who have all or most friends within own group.

	Anglo		Chinese		Italian	
Numerically dominant						
all friends in own group	62%	(13)	45%	(14)	12%	(3)
most friends in own group	5%	(1)	36%	(11)	56%	(14)
Total	67%	(14)	81%	(25)	68%	(17)
Numerically subordinate						
all friends in own group	22%	(4)	4%	(1)	10%	(2)
most friends in own group	17%	(3)	44%	(10)	24%	(5)
Total	39%	(7)	48%	(11)	34%	(7)

While we found significant inter-ethnic differences in number and intimacy of out-group friendships, for all three ethnic groups the ethnic density factor is a better predictor of number of close out-group friendships than is the particular ethnic group membership of the child.

Our data, on the importance of the relative density of their own ethnic group in the degree and intimacy of children's inter-ethnic interaction contradicts the majority of previous studies, which have been done in the United States. There, where several investigators in the last four decades have looked at children's inter-group relations (mainly across racial lines), the most common finding has been that own group preference increases as the size of the out-group increases; or, where one's own group is numerically subordinate, (see Gottlieb, 1965; Loomis, 1943; Lundberg and Dickson, 1952; and St. John, 1964 and 1975).

A possible explanation for the fact that the direction of this relationship, between numerical minority status and increased inter-ethnic friendship, is the opposite of most American findings may be that the status differential between the ethnic groups (two of them recently arrived in Canada) we looked at is not so great or so fixed as in the American situations studied, and that these children are more likely to meet and view peers as equals, ethnic group membership notwithstanding. Furthermore, ethnic barriers are generally more permeable than racial ones. (But our results do hold for the one racially different group included as well).

If we accept the idea (for which there is impressive if not conclusive evidence, as cited by Williams, 1964) that close friendships formed in early adolescence with ethnically different peers may predict less out group prejudice, less ethnocentrism, and (for minority groups) an increased felt ability to participate in the larger society, then children in very mixed neighbourhoods who belong to one of the smaller groups in the mixture are potentially less vulnerable to ethnocentrism and social marginality at least in a city where immigration is recent and group status rankings are not rigid.

So what does our data point to for policy-makers? Changing school boundaries is politically and practically difficult. I think the best next step is to use the best strategies available to maximize the possibilities for positive inter-ethnic contact, especially in those situations where, we can predict on the basis of our findings, it is less likely to occur with frequency; that is in ethnically less diverse settings, and for ethnic groups in a numerically dominant situation. Those best strategies available would seem to me to be those in which teachers whenever possible structure direct contact into the daily classroom programme, thus meeting Allport's four criteria of

equal status, close contact, a common goal and an approving authority figure. Such strategies are already widely tested and show more promise of success than other, more costly, less direct and more complicated interventions. If you'd like to hear more about cooperative classroom strategies, attend the Division 15 sessions tomorrow at 11 a.m. and Wednesday at 10 a.m.

SUMMARY

In the four neighbourhoods in Toronto which we studied, we found that opportunities for inter-ethnic and inter-racial contact are related to actual contact, in the form of friendship choices. Further, this is true not only for casual contacts but for close friendships as well. Intimate, as opposed to superficial contact is one of the four characteristics of the contact situation suggested by Allport as fundamental, if inter-group contacts are to result in positive inter-group relations. In the two most ethnically diverse of our four schools, a substantial majority of the children in our sample have close, out-group friends. Furthermore, we have seen that it is not only the ethnic diversity of the school which is related to actual contact; an important intervening variable is the relative size of a child's own ethnic group within the school. When the child's own group is a small proportion of the student body (e.g. 5 - 11%) he is much more likely to make both casual and close friends of other ethnicities than when his own group dominates the student body (e.g., is 37 - 71% of it).

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